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ABSTRACT

Black North America is ethnically and culturally diverse. It contains many groups who do not call themselves or have not always called themselves "Negro," "Black," "African-American," and so forth, such as Louisiana Creoles of color and many of the Indian tribes east of the Mississippi. There are also numerous North American ethnic groups of African descent whose ancestors came as free people from Jamaica, Nigeria, Haiti, Cuba, and so forth. In the United States, such groups encounter a system of classifying race and stereotypes about people of African descent that differ substantially from those in their native lands. This essay concerns the responses of these ethnic groups to contemporary North American conceptions of race, as well as their role in creating and reshaping these conceptions. This article challenges the current consensus in the social sciences that dismisses "race" as an invalid analytic construct, and it proposes an alternative to the unilinear "assimilation" model that is commonly presumed to chart the historical experience of immigrants to North America. It is proposed that there are at least two tracks of immigrant assimilation in the United States--one "white" and taken for granted, and the other "black." Of particular interest to educators are reflections on the role of schools in the diverse channels of assimilation, the allegedly different socioeconomic and academic performance of immigrant and native blacks, and the struggle over who should benefit from forms of hiring and school admissions intended to remedy racial discrimination. (Contains 81 references.) (Author/SLD)

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Summary of

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The Other African-Americans

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Ethnography depends on a delicate balance between, on the one hand, recognizing the validity of other peoples' lifeways and, on the other, maintaining sufficient distance form local ideological debates and convictions to explain these lifeways--to show how they hang together and yet to demonstrate that any particular combination of ideology and lifeway is a product of history, and not of inevitable nature. I have conducted most of my professional field research overseas and on forms of thought and conduct--transvestism, spirit possession, and animal sacrifice in the Yoruba kingdoms and in the Brazilian Candomblé--that I regard as, in themselves, morally unproblematic. I wish to turn the ethnographic gaze shaped by these experiences back onto my home society, in the hope of elevating current debates about an issue that many of my compatriots and colleagues do find morally troubling--"race."

For some, it is but an epiphenomenon and survival of pre-20th-century slavery (Fields 1990), a politically

motivated abuse of science (Kottak 1994:83; Schultz and Lavenda 1995:7-8), a form of "illogic" (Spickard 1992), a unique contradiction to the real biological unity of humankind and a unique threat to the ethically desirable political cooperation of all humankind (Appiah 1992). As a middle-class African-American, I am a member of a group for which "race" is an emotionally charged and highly convincing representation of much social experience and a discourse highly instrumental in the creation of opportunities long denied us. So, I must say that the broad scholarly consensus against "race" strikes me as instructive but not altogether beneficent in its political implications.

However, the ethnographic gaze invites us to step beyond the parochial debate over whether "race" is good or bad, right or wrong. All it requires is that we recognize "race" as real, because it shapes and is shaped by the lives of the people we study no less than is "nationhood," "gender," or "religious affiliation." Virtually all social groupings--like races, tribes, and nations--embody claims of roots in nature or the distant past, and there is much in any of them that the critic might describe as unempirical, illogical or divisive. Yet, for the ethnographer, it is more interesting to ask about the past forces and, even more importantly, the ongoing ones that shape such groupings. How have they come to matter to contemporary people who are, we must assume, essentially no less intelligent than the

ethnographer and his/her intended audience. When does any given identity matter, and how has it been reshaped by the circumstances?

In this essay, I wish to consider "race" not as a category that is generally worthy or unworthy of the "scientific" pretensions with which some people invest it. This essay is not a discussion of "race" as an analytic concept or a comprehensive comparison among concepts of race cross-culturally. Rather, I wish to explore its changing meanings and enduring significance in the 20th-century U.S. Moreover, I am concerned to demonstrate the role of agency among the oppressed in creating and shaping the categories mobilized in their negotiation of a place of respect in American society. My sense is that voluntary migration and immigration have played a major role in the shaping of "race" in 20th-century United States.

I first tilt my hat toward the provocative observation by W.E.B. Du Bois (1935), James Baldwin (1985) and, most recently, Toni Morrison (1993)--not to mention David Roediger (1991) and Noel Ignatiev (1995)--that Irish, Milanese, Serbs and Walloons only become "white" once they reach the United States. Moreover, the denunciation of Blacks is the price of their admission to the American dream. The role of Irish immigrants in 19th-century violence against free Blacks, and in turn-of-the-century

minstrel shows intent upon demeaning Blacks has made them prototypical in this model of immigrant assimilation.

I would add that Nigerians, Jamaicans, and dark-skinned Puerto Ricans, for example, don't become Black until they reach The United States. Moreover, I will argue, these simultaneous and contested processes of becoming Black or white continually re-define race, its referents, and its principles in North American society.1 It is particularly at moments of conflict and crisis that those processes of re-definition can best be read.

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1 I capitalize the term "Black" in many cases in order to recognize the conscious implications of group identity invested by certain peoples in this description and to distinguish this identity from the mere description of phenotype and/or social rank intended by other peoples when they use the term "black" and its counterparts in Portuguese, Spanish, Cape Verdean Crioulo, and some varieties of West Indian English, for example. I have generally written "white" in lower case because, in the North American regions of greatest interest in this history of race and immigration, the term is used emically as a phenotypic description and is unmarked as an identity. The standard term for its racial/cultural group corollary is simply "American." However, I suspend these rules in the quotation of texts written by others, which I leave unaltered.

"Not *Really* Black!"

Maria Consuelo O'Brien Hylton was a law professor at De Paul in Chicago; she was married to another law professor at Northwestern in nearby Evanston. She had been born of an Australian mother and a Black Cuban father. Earlier this year, Boston University offered her husband a job. In the interest of keeping him, Northwestern Law School tentatively offered her a job too.

Well, it turns out that she, like her husband, had some ideas about, for example, mandated employee benefits, the minimum wage, and the family leave act that were too conservative for the tastes of the Black Law Students' Association, not to mention the Latino Law Students' Association, and Feminists for Social Change at Northwestern.

So, rather than risk allowing another minority conservative to fill a slot and excuse the Law School from any further hiring, the Black law students pulled out the big guns. They and the only other Black law professor there said, "She's not Black!" despite the fact that she had participated in Black student organizations ever since undergraduate school, for which reason the Latino students chimed in that she wasn't Latina either. And of course the Feminists for Social Change wouldn't support her because she was against the Family Leave Act.

All of which illustrates, among other things, the great advantage of having a constituency. I can only imagine how it might feel psychologically for Maria Hylton to be deprived of so many of her possible identities at once.

This is the incident that came to my mind ~~yesterday,~~ when I heard something from a Black participant in another A.A.A. panel that is commonsensical to some Americans--"Anyone who wants to be Black must be crazy!" Yet, people are classified, de-classified, and re-classified everyday--sometimes by their own will and sometimes by somebody else's.

Allow me to give another illustration. In Brooklyn on August 19, 1991, a driver in the procession of the leader of the Lubavitcher Hasidic community ran a red light and, in the ensuing accident, crushed a seven-year-old Black boy against a building. Observers claimed that the Hasidic paramedics who first arrived on the scene treated the Jewish driver rather than attending to the injured Black boy, whose death, in turn, precipitated such anger that a crowd of Black youths protested in front of the Hasidic community headquarters, and others murdered an innocent Hasidic student.

As the media focused on Black-Jewish tensions and leaders of the local African-American community came forth to articulate their own sense of frustration with the dynamics of racial inequality in New York, other forms of ethnic tension and inequality smoldered palpably but in

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relative invisibility. Older residents in the heavily Caribbean community where the Guyanese boy, Gavin Cato, died were at a loss to explain the three days of rioting that followed. Williams College sociologist Philip Kasinitz, a veteran researcher of this community, heard some observers attributed the violence to young people "'from the projects' spurred on by 'outside agitators'--in other words, to [a native-born] African-American 'underclass'" (Kasinitz 1992: xiii). Although immigrants and native-born Blacks alike were found among the community leaders, protesters and rioters, a whispered dialogue underlined old ethnic and class divisions in the Black Metropolis of New York. At the same time, this capped off a series of violent crises over the previous ten years in New York that re-shaped the already-unstable relation of ethnicity and class to that root metaphor of American social life--race.

The truism that Gotham sets the pace is all the more true, albeit less obvious, when cast in Black. The contiguous Brooklyn neighborhoods of Crown Heights and East Flatbush are but the present focus of developments transforming the meaning of "race" and "ethnicity" in Black communities throughout the United States. As academia becomes increasingly complacent in its conviction that "race" is socially constructed and is therefore somehow less compellingly real, the power of that social construct over ordinary peoples lives has both grown and changed apace. The Hart-Cellar immigration reforms of 1965 inaugurated a

flood of non-European immigration into the U.S. The consequent multiplication of various Black "ethnic groups" has not eliminated race-specific discrimination and opportunity. But it has complicated them. If what is called "the Black race" has seemed the United States's eternal "Other," that race is also defined, more and more conspicuously, by its own internal "Others," who have actually quietly re-shaped African-American identity over the course of nearly a century.

The Others that Define the Self

Classifying any set of people as "other" risks trivializing their experience, homogenizing it, and marginalizing it with respect to what it is other than. However, my purpose is exactly the opposite. My intention today is to underline the existence of multiple groups of African immigrants and people of African descent who, since the end of the slave trade, have transformed--by addition or by negation--the genealogy and the identity of the people we now call African-Americans. According to the 1990 National Census, the largest among such Black or African ethnic groups consist of 435,000 Jamaicans, 289,000 Haitians, 362,097 self-described black Puerto Ricans, 92,000 Nigerians, 79,000 Egyptians, 76,000 Trinidadians and Tobagonians, 51,000 Cape Verdeans, 35,000 Barbadians, 162,000 Black Cubans, 31,000 Ethiopians, along with smaller numbers of Ghanaians, Moroccans, Grenadians, Virgin

Islanders, Afro-Guyanese, black Dominicans, Afro-Panamanians, black Mexicans, Jewish South Africans, and Somalis. Their numbers have doubled, tripled, and, in some cases, quadrupled since 1980. These self-declared Black, predominantly black, or African ethnics join a number of other groups I wish to highlight for the purposes of this analysis: that is, millions of Caribbean and native-born people who avow their mixed ancestry, Louisiana Creoles of color, Charleston people of color, and the numerous Native American groups east of the Mississippi with visibly African ancestry. These immigrant groups, multi-racials, and "little races" (Thompson 1972) like the Louisiana Creoles exist in a particularly intimate dialectic with African-American identity.[2]

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2 Thompson (1972) describes as "little races" those groups formed chiefly at the intersection of European- and African-derived populations that have asserted their autonomy from locally stigmatized African-derived groups by remaining endogamous and proclaiming the purity of their descent from some noble group of founding ancestors who, of course, were not black. In the United States, many of these groups evidently possess Indian, or Native American, ancestry as well. Thus, they are alternately called "tri-racial isolates" (e.g., Harte 1959). In order to protect their access to the material dividends of white assimilation, those groups with the phenotypic potential to "become white"

Let me drop a few names. Among celebrities, I'm thinking of avowed mulattoes (to use the parlance of their day) like Frederick Douglas and Booker T. Washington, apparent ones like W.E.B. Du Bois, Afro-Puerto Ricans like Arthur (or Arturo) Schomburg, and West Indians and their offspring, such as Marcus Garvey, Claude McKay, Shirley Chisholm, Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture), Colin Powell, and Louis Farrakhan.[3] They have played a leading role in the dialogue that has shaped the boundaries and defining characteristics of Blackness in the United States.

Although the plurality of 20th-century black immigrants lives in Florida, New York and Massachusetts, the "other

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(Ignatiev 1995) had to keep their distance from ambiguously dark "little races" like the Louisiana Creoles of color, Malungeons/Lumbees/Croatans, Ramapo Mountain people, and certain named kindreds in any given southern region (see also Sider 1994; Domínguez 1986; Price 1953; Dromgoole 1891). In the late 20th century, such groups have varied in their resolve and in their success at maintaining the credibility of their distinctness from Blacks.

3 Marcus Garvey emigrated from his native Jamaica, as did Harlem Renaissance poet Claude McKay and the parents of General Colin Powell. Stokely Carmichael emigrated from Trinidad. The parents of the former Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm came from Barbados, Malcolm X's mother from Grenada, and Louis Farrakhan's mother from St. Kitts.

African-Americans" have long been important in North American history, and they have been so far beyond the eastern seaboard. For example, there was Jean-Baptiste Point Du Sable, a mulatto born in Saint-Domingue, who first settled the site that would become Chicago, and there were the Afro-Mexican founders of Los Angeles , both in the late 18th century (Dixon 1983: 4-5). The "Other African-Americans," and the narratives into which we have often seemlessly integrated them, have made us who we are. Not only have they formed a disproportionate subset of the African-American leadership and professional class, but, through their difference, they have played a central role in re-defining African-American politics and culture in the 20th century.

Other unexpected participants have shaped this dialogue, quietly but no less evocatively. For example, Jewish South Africans make up one of the largest immigrant groups from Africa in the United States. Yet, at least in the Harvard Admissions Office, only an occasional South African ethnic applicant has sought classification as an African-American. Even if it failed to advance current scholarly visions of ethnicity and race, the ensuing laughter certainly clarified the popular logic of race in the United States. No more than Harvard College admissions officers are most of us likely to recognize Moroccan- or Egyptian-ethnics as African-American, though they come directly and ancestrally from Africa. The "Africa" in

"African-American" is not simply a place but an idea that has taken form in a peculiarly American context. By the 1920s, it had come to encompass vast numbers of people with mixed ancestry. That is to say, the present identification of so-called "light-skinned" and "dark-skinned" Black Americans as members of the same legal, cultural, and marriage-eligibility category is neither primordial nor universal across regions or North America. That identification emerged from a transformative process.

Up until the middle of the 19th century, many southern states and sub-cultures institutionalized the economic and political difference between Blacks and various shades of mulatto, as do most of the contemporary societies from which Black immigrants originate. Not only were mulattoes disproportionately represented among the manumitted and the free throughout the antebellum South, but politically and economically central pockets of Southern society, like Charleston, S.C., and New Orleans, Louisiana, sustained endogamous communities of prosperous and often slave-holding mulattoes.

Yet, after the Civil War, large numbers of mulattoes from the upper South and the North flooded into the lower South, where an alliance of blacks, mulattoes and northern whites dominated lower-South state administrations until 1877 (see Williamson 1980). Given the historical duration of mulatto privilege and the depth of the alliance between elite Louisiana whites and mulattoes, mulattoes' later

alliance with blacks was by no means inevitable. Some Blacks' persistent sense of mistrust implied as much, as did the endurance, at least until the 1960s, of non-"Black" groups of partially African ancestry throughout the South. Of these enduring "little races," the Louisiana Creoles are only the most obvious example (Thompson 1972; Domínguez 1986).

The consolidation of an overwhelming national unity between blacks and mulattoes could not have been taken for granted. The fact that they had some "blood" in common could not alone ensure their unity, not even after the southern states instituted and began to enforce, with violence, laws against "miscegenation" between whites and non-whites. Post-bellum mulattoes in general could have adopted the Louisiana fashion of marrying other mulattoes, including their own cousins. Indeed, various pockets of them did so all over the South. Yet, an even more vast migration of black and brown people followed the failure of Reconstruction. This time, they converged on Harlem, which would remain for decades the Mecca of the Black world. People of color came from the Caribbean, Central America, Africa, the U.S. South, New England, and the mid-west, such that, by the mid-1920s, about a quarter of New York City's population was foreign-born (Osofsky 1963:131).

Many of the non-English-speakers were exempted from Blackness. Among them were the mixed-race majority of Dominicans and the plurality of Puerto Ricans who would be

called "Black" in the United States if Spanish were not their native language. During certain historical periods, language has been instrumental in establishing Cape Verdeans' non-Blackness, as it once had been for Louisiana Creoles of African descent. This implicit linguistic criterion coincides with a cultural fact about most Black immigrants. Though a peculiarly North American racial ideology and legal system may change their minds, most of them come from places where people are not classified exclusively as either Black or white. In most societies where Europeans and Africans met in large numbers, various degrees and phenotypic outcomes of miscegenation and various degrees of class ascent correspond to a multiplicity of what Wagley calls "social races" in between "black" and "white" (Wagley credited in Degler 1971: 105). In Brazil and Puerto Rico, for example, hair texture and socio-economic status are as influential as skin color, if not more so, in determining one's racial classification. Moreover, "black," in those societies, is rarely a social identity that anyone would assume for him or herself. For example, in Puerto Rico, most persons of visibly African ancestry would rather be called trigueño, mulato, jabao or grifo than moreno, prieto or negro (see Jorge 1979: 183), except in the affectionate uses of negro as a term of address.[4] Indeed,

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4 These terms are difficult to translate because they connote certain complex phenotypes but may be used to refer

on the mainland, moreno is a color-coded and pejorative word reserved for native-born African-Americans.

Moreover, in the Anglophone West Indies, poor people of purely northern European extraction, as well as any class of Portuguese or Middle-Eastern ethnic, hardly make it into the "white" category at all (Patterson 1972: 28-9). What is clear all over Latin America, the Caribbean and the Cape Verde Islands is that "money whitens." To put it grossly, a wealthy black is called a "mulatto," a wealthy mulatto is

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to persons of other phenotypes in order to convey degrees of politeness or assessments of their social status that may be regarded as inconsistent with their phenotypes. In the abstract, jabao and grifo refer to light-skinned people with features or hair texture that indicate African ancestry. Trigueño refers to brunettes, to olive- or dark-skinned people, or to African-looking people whom the speaker does not wish to offend. Prieto means "dark, swarthy"; "tight, compact"; or "stingy, niggardly" (Jorge 1979:134-35; see also Rodríguez 1995:83). Adding to the definitional problem is the fact that the terms negro, negra and their diminuitives negrito and negrita are also commonly used as affectionate terms of address for people regardless of their phenotypes. Moreover, negro/a, blanco/a, and their diminuitives are commonly used as nicknames respectively for the relatively dark- and light-skinned members of any given family.

called a "white," and an underprivileged white is called anything but "white."

In the U.S., money and mixed ancestry haven't been enough to release anyone from legal and social "Negro-ness," "Blackness" or "African-Americanness" since the end of Reconstruction in the late 19th century. A perennial joke among native-born African Americans sums up as follows their sense of the enduring rigidity of American racial boundaries:

> What do you call a Black man in a three-piece suit?
>
> "Nigger!"

However, I would submit, migrants' inter-generational renegotiation of who they are and where their material advantages lie have continually re-defined both the boundaries and the cultural indices of "Blackness." Indeed, it seems to me that the repeated migratory convergence of racially and nationally diverse peoples of African descent in the late 19th and early 20th century laid the very foundations of contemporary African-American identity and popular culture. Indeed, let me be more explicit about the cross-cultural hypothesis I am ultimately trying to advance. It is not stasis and cultural continuity but migration and cross-cultural contact that most actively shape ethnic identity.

Immigrant Assimilation and the Black "Deficit"

The first purpose of this discussion is to recognize non-native African-Americans and the conditions of their disproportionate contribution to African-American culture and identity, as well as to American culture at large. Its second purpose is to re-assess a highly influential sociological model of migrant and immigrant assimilation into U.S. society, as well as its tendentious uses in the sociological and journalistic discussion of African-American culture. A number of influential texts since Glazer and Moynihan's Beyond the Melting Pot (1963) and Barth's Ethnic Groups and Boundaries (1969) have underlined the persistence of ethnicity even in a highly integrated economy and amid immigrant ethnic groups' convergence upon a "dominant culture." In some American sociology, the form of immigrants' assimilation has been set in contrast to the non-assimilation of native-born African-Americans. Glazer and Moynihan (1963), like Thomas Sowell in writings well into the 1980s, have focused on the contrasting economic performances of native-born and foreign-born African-Americans to suggest that Afro-American poverty results not from racism but from a deficit of the shared culture that guarantees success and assimilation into American society. In sum, Sowell and his journalistic successors have argued that West Indians have overcome the effects of discrimination by virtue of their cultural disposition to work hard, save money, and study. Various empirical investigations by Suzanne Model (1991) and Reynolds Farley

(1986) have question the factual accuracy of Sowell's hypothesis. For example, Model concludes that native-born Black males outperform West Indian males in earnings and other socio-economic status indices, while native-born Black women outperform some Caribbean ethnic groups and not others. Farley concludes that West Indians outperform African Americans by a small measure but that immigrant and native whites vastly outperform both, falsifying any impression that Caribbean immigrants have escaped the effects of racism. Various analysts who observe a West Indian advantage over the general Black population observe its likeness to the advantage of white immigrants' children over the general white population, of which context seems to explain more than primordial culture.

Even if the logic of African-American cultural deficiency has lost its currency in the academy, it remains a journalistic and popular cliché, often linked implicitly to the discussion of not only West Indian but Asian "model minorities." I propose an alternative model of both African-American culture and the character of immigrant and migrant assimilation into "U.S. society." I am less interested in unsustainable arguments about the antecedent culture of immigrants than about how the culture of migration has transformed us all.

Not one but at least two broad and long-precedented paths have characterized assimilation into U.S. society since the failure of Reconstruction--assimilation into two

Americas, not only "separate and unequal" but culturally different, in which different sets of music, clothing, styles of movement, and mythically homogenized conceptions of genetic origin are salient.

Twentieth-century whites might justly classify assimilation and assimilability in terms of the merging of Greekness, Italianness, Serbianness and Irishness, for example, into the fraternity of American whiteness, which excludes the non-white through residential segregation, hiring restrictions, and non-intermarriage. White ethnicity may continue to thrive in particular food preferences, ritual practices, and other periodic displays. It may even become a tool for bettering a person or group's relative position in the privileged club of whiteness (Barth 1969; Wallerstein 1990). Conversely, insofar as an ethnic identity compromises an aspiring white person or group's claim to whiteness, that ethnic identity might either be abandoned or aggressively re-defined, as in the case of white Cubans and white Louisiana Creoles. For example, a high proportion of white Miami Cubans intermarries with so-called Anglos (Llanes 1982: 202). They tend to loathe publicity about a popular religion among them identified with African origins, that is, Santería, and statistics suggest a high and increasing degree of residential segregation between white and black Cubans (Dixon 1982: 11; 1983: 15; Denton and Massey 1989: 800). Likewise, since Reconstruction, white Louisiana Creoles have vociferously

and angrily denied the very existence of black Creoles amid other whites' enduring suspicion that all "Creoles" are part-Black (Domínguez 1986: 93ff).

It is understandable then that whites and persons in white-dominated achievement structures so often perceive Black culture as a deficit, and that certain economically marginal immigrant and white-native groups could revel in the good fortune of not being born African-American. Indeed, some immigrants of African descent have reveled briefly in that luxury. During the 1920s, some immigrants from the Caribbean, when confronted with racially discriminatory treatment, were reported to have gotten results by shouting, "I am a subject of the British Empire. I shall report this to my Consulate!" (Reid 1939:pg.#?). Until the present day, some Spanish-, French-, Haitian Creole- and English-speaking Migrants from the caribbean have used their non-native languages and accents in dealings with whites to distinguish themselves from native-born African-Americans. Kasinitz reports the following dialogue with a West Indian banker:

> Informant: Since I have been here, I have always recognized that this is a racist country and I have made every effort not to lose my accent.
>
> PK: Your accent is an asset?
>
> PK: Yes.
>
> PK: In dealing with blacks or whites?

> Informant: With <u>whites</u>! But then later, when the time is appropriate, you can confront these people with their racism.
>
> (Kasinitz 1992: 36)

Contemporary native-born Black New Yorkers claim that some Afro-Latinos and Haitians speak their languages loudly in public specifically to call attention to their distinctness from native-born Blacks, a phenomenon to which Reid gave a similar explanation in the late 1930s. Mary Waters (1994) reports in the mid-1990s that upwardly mobile, 2nd-generation West Indian-ethnics in New York continue to stress their distinctive ethnic origins and thus explain their socio-economic success.

Hence, the first stage of the cultural and social assimilation of immigrants of all colors in the United States is their recognition of the difference between the white ideal and the non-white deficit, of which the native-born African-American is made the exemplar.

<u>Assimilating Black</u>

Yet, native-born African-Americans, including the children of many immigrants, possess a surprisingly different sense of their shared culture, not as a deficit and not as a simple lack of whiteness. No one more than African-Americans of the working class and those who live at the mightiest vortex of Black immigration carries a greater

certainty about the distinctive worth and power of African-American culture. In the hegemonic Black culture of which New York is the epicenter, there are more and less proper models of and for African-American conduct and creativity, as well as more and less key symbols in the general projection of meaning on the world. No one who has listened to Rap music, with its mix of Caribbean and mainland rhythms and elocutionary styles, or to its Nuyorican and Dominican spin-offs in Spanglish could think otherwise (see Holston 1993).

Music is just one medium of African-American culture and its projection, but Rap and El Rap illustrate vividly what African-American culture is not--it is not a deficit, it is not static, it is not homogeneous, and it is not monolingual. Because the African-American population has changed, as have those who, by choice and by segregation, partake of it, so have the paradigmatic models of Afro-American culture changed. Much of that change has resulted from the very assimilation of exogenous groups, many of them migrants and immigrants, into the then-current group of American "Blacks" or "Negroes." Moreover, African-American efforts always to keep their language and their art beyond the comprehension and imitation of whites have added urgency to the borrowing of African hairstyles, like cornrows, Caribbean ones, like dread-locks, Caribbean words, like "massives" (meaning, "members of the inner circle"), "big up" (a greeting), and an endless array of musical

performance styles and dances, like Reggae, Dancehall and the "Boggle."

In turn, the assimilation of whites into Black musical and linguistic styles is also an old dynamic in American civilization. In the 20th century, assimilation into Black sartorial, musical and elocutionary styles has become a hallmark of moral resistance and rebellion among white youth. For example, in the 1950s, Southern working-class teenagers launched the Elvis Presley phenomenon (see Chambers 1976: 161). In the 1980s and '90s, suburban white boys have become one of the most lucrative market[s] for Rap music, as well as some of its most popular performers. The impermanence of white teenagers' aesthetic rebellion underlines the dimension of choice implicit in all ethnic identity and the transformation of ethnic, class and generational lifeways that inevitably results from such choices. Unlike white youth, mixed-race people and the children of black immigrants seldom have the choice to abandon their "Blackness." They can choose to recognize or emphasize their mixed-race-ness or West Indianness for certain occasions and purposes, but they are compelled to acknowledge their African-Americanness for an overwhelming array of others. For them, Blackness is not simply an "ethnicity," in the sense that, say, "Irish-Americanness" or "Norwegian-Americanness" is. It is a phenotype with certain unavoidable meanings in North American society. But that is

only one sense in which Blackness became their "race." The other sense is historical and cultural.

For some migrants and immigrants, deep skin color, segregation laws, illegal segregationist practices, like redlining, and laws against inter-"racial" marriage made African-American neighborhoods and social circles inescapable. Some others, whose appearance might have allowed them to pass into whiteness, or at least to remain separate from blackness, did not "pass." The convergence of regionally, culturally, and phenotypically diverse people upon the over-crowded and segregated world of Harlem in the 1920s generated an unparalleled cultural creativity and intellectual gravity. The culturally diverse elite of the Harlem Renaissance embroidered the legal and pseudo-biological category of "race" with the foundations of an enduring nationalist ideology, an enduring political alliance, and an enduring cultural canon rich in tropes of our least common historical denominator--Africa.

Again, about a quarter of New York's Negroes in the 1920s were foreign-born. After a decline from the 1930s to the early 1960s, the foreign-born Black population now exceeds one-quarter of the city's general Black population (Kasinitz 1992: 8, 41). These proportions have had direct consequences on African-American culture and ideology nationally. In the 1920s, the black and mulatto, native and foreign-born artists and politicians of the Harlem Renaissance came together to celebrate the varied hues of

Africa's offspring. Their paean to Black unity was international in scope. One of the most noted composers of the era was the Malagasy-born Andy Razak. Yet, it was particularly under Caribbean influence that Africa became emblematic of Black unity. There was no lack of inter-ethnic rancor and complexion prejudice among the "Negroes" of Harlem, but this unprecedented convergence of culturally and genetically diverse African-Americans, brought together in the crucible of racial segregation, produced the bedrock of an African-American literary canon, models of political alliance and organization, and the pan-Africanist premises of Caribbean and African-American popular culture in the 1960s, '70s and '80s, when, again, because of the Hart-Cellar Act, levels of Black immigration have skyrocketed (Kasinitz 1992: 3, 255 n2). It seems obvious, then, that voluntary international immigration and internal migration by blacks and mulattoes have been major pre-conditions of African-American identity and culture as we know them today.

Though they played a disproportionate role in the Harlem Renaissance and Garvey's "Back-to-Africa" movement in the '20s, English-speaking West Indians are not the only immigrant populations transforming African-Americanness during this century. There have also been Africans, Haitians and Afro-Hispanics, or Afro-Latinos. Haitians and Afro-Latinos indeed participated in the Garvey movement (e.g., Laguerre 1984: 167-68). In contemporary New York, Nigerians and Haitians seem to have gravitated toward West

Indian neighborhoods, suggesting a new aggregate form of these groups' future assimilation into the larger American population. The concentration of late-arriving English-speaking West Indian, Africans and Haitians in Crown Heights and East Flatbush is a phenomenon of the past three decades. Although race continues to affect the life chances of the latest generation of Black immigrants, the long-term cultural consequences of their residential concentration within selected Afro-American neighborhoods has yet to be seen. What is especially striking in the light of this increasing residential concentration or separation is the apparently high frequency of intermarriage between the children of native-born and foreign-born Blacks, notwithstanding much semi-public talk about ethnicity (cf. Waters 1994). On the other hand, instances of their intermarriage with immigrant or native-born whites not only are rare but appear to invite considerably greater disapproval from parents.

Black Latinos?

Among all Black immigrant categories, Afro-Latinos, or Spanish-speaking Blacks, are the most difficult to define. Yet, the future of their relation to other African-Americans invites careful reflection. Given the generally non-binary Latin American modes of defining race, only a small proportion of the many Caribbean Spanish-speakers with African ancestry identifies itself socially as "Black,"

since its closest translations in Spanish (negro and prieto) specify relatively dark skin color, rather than ethnicity, and/or strongly connote lowly socio-economic status. Hence, when the Census recognized only the binary racial categories of negro and white, the vast majority among these mixed-race immigrant groups identified themselves as white. Hence, the 5.4% of Puerto Ricans, the 5.3% of Cubans, and the 21.3% of Dominicans who describe themselves as Black on the 1990 Census (Gómez 1993) are probably only a fraction of the Latinos who would be so classified according to the proverbial "one-drop rule" of North American Black identity.[5]

A single language unifies black Cubans, in principle, with white and brown Spanish-speakers, and separates them from native-born African-Americans. Yet, Caribbean Latinos of visibly African descent tend to learn with a jolt how much their color affects their residential choices and economic opportunities in the United States. For example, Denton and Massey (1989) report that self-identified black Hispanics and native-born African-Americans show equivalent

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5 I wish to thank Christina Gómez, graduate student in sociology at Harvard University, for the use of her tabulation on the racial identity of Latinos. Her data are drawn from the Public Use Microdata Set of the 1990 Census of Population and Housing and will be considered more extensively in her dissertation on the same topic.

levels of segregation from Anglos and are considerably more segregated from native whites than are white Hispanics. Black Puerto Ricans, who form the largest group of black Latinos, are also the most segregated from whites. Most striking is the fact that white and black Latinos are considerably segregated from one another in most metropolitan areas.

Like other Black immigrant groups, black Latinos have gravitated disproportionately toward New York, even when Miami had been their original point of entry into the United States. And, in New York especially, write Denton and Massey, "the Hispanic population appears to be bifurcating, with black Hispanics moving closer to American blacks and away from both Anglos and white Hispanics" (Denton and Massey 1989: 802).

The Denton and Massey study has been criticized for the small size of its sample, since relatively Hispanics consider themselves Black. Moreover, the study is perhaps misleading in suggesting that the residential isolation of self-described "Black Hispanics" results from their Blackness. It seems equally plausible that those Hispanics who live in Black neighborhoods for a range of other reasons are simply much more likely to call themselves "Black." Perhaps both phenomena are at work, making it difficult to specify the precise relationship between the phenotype and the residential status of Hispanics. Nonetheless, the study effectively demonstrates that there is some documentable

correlation among Hispanics in the U.S. between Black self-identification and residential separation from Hispanic and non-Hispanic whites. From Denton and Massey's statistics, we do not know the precise causal role of phenotype or of discriminatory practices by realtors.

Anecdotally, however, we do know of the tremendous psychological incentives for dark Latinos, especially women, to seek the company of African-Americans and to move away from Latino communities. For example, despite the general Puerto Rican ideological commitment to denying the role of racism in their culture, many Afro-Puerto Ricans feel the burden of disapproval on their blackness. One Afro-Puerto Rican woman, Angela Jorge, writes,

> The one overriding feeling generated by the [ambivalence] of the Puerto Rican community about color is that of guilt at having disgraced first the family and then the community by simply being black or darker than other members of the family. The popular dictum adelantar la raza ["to advance the race"] tends only to reinforce this feeling of guilt (Jorge 1979: 181-82).

"To advance the race" is the injunction for dark men and women to marry lighter, in the hope of "improving" the family's appearance and socio-economic opportunities. The same author reports that little Puerto Rican girls are humiliated as those who comb their hair mumble, Maldito sea este pelo!--"Damn this hair"--and those concerned about

their lips constantly remind them, Cierra la bemba--"Close your mouth [so your lower lip won't hang]." In these daily humiliations, Jorge finds the explanation behind Eduardo Seda Bonilla's 1970 observation that the black Puerto Rican in the United States tends progressively to "assimilate into society as a black."

"For many," continues Jorge, "the assimilation is so complete as to affect their speech in English to such an extent that they, according to Seda Bonilla, speak English with a Southern accent," which Jorge takes really to be Black English. Obviously, by the next generation--if not by the present one," says Jorge, "the black Puerto Rican who has assimilated will no longer identify--or be identified--socially and emotionally with the Puerto Rican community" (Jorge 1979: 182).[6] Indeed, black Puerto Ricans are often told by others of their ethnic group "You don't look Puerto Rican" (Ibid.: 185). At the hands of lighter-skinned Puerto Rican migrants to the continental U.S., the exclusion of darker-skinned and curlier-haired phenotypes from the somatic norm of the ethnic group has become an important dimension of collective self-redefinition, in a way clearly responsive to the constraints and possibilities of North American racial discourse. First-generation immigrants and islanders, I am told, feel much less comfortable than

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6 Dark Louisiana Creoles often feel similarly pushed out by their multi-complexioned families.

subsequent generations in recognizing kinship with African-Americans. For a Puerto Rican to "look like a moreno ['Black American']" is not only identified as a contradiction in terms but is treated as a stain on the ethnic group. So, several relatively dark-skinned, curly-haired and upwardly mobile Nuyorican men have told me of their struggle to be recognized as both Latino and black, to be accepted as confreres of both groups. Yet, both groups would deny them this dual citizenship (see also Perdomo 1995; Santiago 1995). Men of unknown accomplishments report being marginalized or rejected by both groups, whereas men of extraordinary accomplishments, like Arthur/Arturo Schomburg are claimed, with exclusive intent, by each group (Castillo and Sandoval 1978). Whatever their accomplishments, dark Nuyorican men regularly report having been called "nigger" by white strangers. One doubts they will find the succor they seek within Latino communities. Dark Hispanic men and women will certainly find comfort in public African-American discourses about the beauty and dignity of Blackness, but the private discourses derogating African features are little different from those in Latino homes.

Nonetheless, black Puerto Rican women in the continental U.S. seem to face a more painful dilemma and a much more pressing need to choose one or the other communal/racial alliance. Jorge (1979:140) describes the dilemma as follows:

> For her, there is no middle ground. Even the simple daily experience of walking on the streets becomes a major trauma. IN her neighborhood someone invariably would _echarle flores_ [i.e., to compliment her appearance]. However, now that she has left the confines of her _barrio_ and the protection of her neighborhood, she becomes one more black woman among others. A black woman is not admired, or even glanced at, by most Latin men, since they too are operating under the dictum of _adelantar la raza_....The white man, too, will not look at the black Puerto Rican woman (unless he thinks she is a prostitute), since to establish a friendship that may lead to Marriage, is to invite the wrath of the dominant society. The black man [i.e., the African-American man], on the other hand, will venture forward, but will fail to understand why his friendly overtures are rebuffed. For the black Puerto Rican woman knows that to accept his offer of friendship, of intimacy, is to invite the wrath of her family and, to some degree, of her community.

And there comes a point when many black Puerto Rican women feel that they have no choice but to accept that offer or, indeed, regard it as a relief.

An Afro-Cuban woman--the late Rutgers psychology professor Lourdes Casal--wrote that in the United States _mi color me define más que mi cultura_--"my color defines me

more than my culture and education." She recalled, "In the U.S., during the 60s, I was forced to look at my Blackness with different eyes. I had become accustomed to considering myself una mulata in a mulatto country, in a quintessentially mulatto culture. The U.S. was a shock. Here I had to learn to assert my Blackness somehow--even or particularly as a Hispanic Black--in a country where Black and white were defined in opposition to one another and where any attempt to avoid the dichotomy seemed to be some kind of betrayal" (Casal 1978: 62). I will return to this issue of guilt and betrayal, which seems to me a theme in many African-Americans' assimilation into a common identity and culture.

But, first, let me suggest that, whatever the degree of residential bifurcation of black and white Latinos, there may be good reason to include many of the "whitest" Latinos--that is, white Cubans--in the category of African-Americans. Many light-skinned Cuban-Americans practice the religion of their Afro-Cuban, Yoruba and BaKongo cultural forebears, known as Ocha (Santería) and Palo Mayombe. Indeed, one such Cuban-American, Ernesto Pichardo, won a Supreme Court case in 1993 to protect santeros' right to perform animal sacrifice. Tens of thousands of Cuban-Americans--apparently far more than the number of regular worshipers on the island on the eve of the 1959 revolution--privately worship Yoruba gods and have taught their form of worship to not only Puerto Ricans and Dominicans but native-

born African-Americans. They have been pivotal in generating the idea among black North American intellectuals, like Ishmael Reed, Henry Louis Gates, John Mason and the King of Oyotunji, South Carolina, H.R.H. Oba Oseijeman Adefunmi, that the Yoruba are our classical civilization and the African source of much African-American culture, notwithstanding the fact that very few of the biological ancestors of native-born Black North Americans originated from Yorubaland. Yet, Yorubaphilia has now become a self-fulfilling prophecy among scores of writers and millions of worshipers on two continents.[7] Moreover, the priority that African-Americans have given to the African aspects of Afro-Cuban religion over its "syncretic" incorporation of Roman Catholic saints has persuaded many white, brown and black santeros to join in the trend toward re-Africanizing their faith. Yet, many resist, and Ocha religion is caught in a tug-of-war between two symbolic functions--as an increasingly important diacritic of pan-

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7 This case bears useful comparison to Western elites' appropriation of Greece as the "classical" origin of their lifeways. Similarly, Greco-Roman classicism, or the privileging of Greece and Rome in the narration of "Western" history, is more a selective pedigree and self-fulfilling prophecy about the constitution of European and American societies than it is the non-partisan report of historical origins that it often pretends to be.

Latino identity and as an increasingly important diacritic of an African-American-led pan-African identity.

Eponyms and Nemeses: African Immigrants

As Kasinitz has suggested, the periods following the greatest influx of voluntary black immigrants into the United States--in the 1910s and '20s and from 1965 onward--have corresponded with the accentuation of Africa as an emblem of the unity of people of African descent in the U.S. (Kasinitz 1992:255n2). In fact, during the latter period, many members of this ethnically hybrid group have come to call themselves "Africans" and "African-Americans." Yet, what strikes this observer is both the depth and the transformative force of the contradictions between the self-representation of this community named for Africa and the realities of the immigrants from Africa.

According to the 1990 Census, there are 364,000 African-born residents of the U.S. and many more who report ancestry from one or another African country. Far and away, the largest group claims Nigerian ancestry (92,000), the next largest Egyptian (79,000), the next largest Cape Verdean (51,000), the next largest Ethiopian (30,581 not including the 4,000 people of Eritrean descent), followed in size by the Ghanaian descent group (20,000), the South African (18,000), the Kenyan (5,000) and so forth. The numbers in each of these groups had nearly doubled, tripled or quadrupled in the previous ten years.

African-born residents of the U.S. are exceptional in many ways. Among all immigrants, those from Africa come in the smallest numbers--only 15,000 per year. This group also boasts the highest levels of education and income. It may also be surprising forty percent of foreign-born U.S. residents from Africa are white and another ten percent "Asian." Flight from political turmoil in Uganda, Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, and South Africa appears to account significantly for these figures. Though the other 50% of this immigrant group is black, one reporter was so shocked by the exceptional educational and economic accomplishments of the whole group that, counterfactually, he entitled his article "The Newest African Americans Aren't Black" (Speer 1994:9-10). On average, "Asian" Africans are the wealthiest, followed by white and then black Africans. Yet, the average income of even black Africans is well beyond the U.S. nation average. Speer himself shows that the average annual income of black African-born household <u>heads</u> alone is "just slightly lower than the median <u>household</u> income for all U.S. households" (Ibid.:9). The title works its journalistic charm not through accuracy but through provocation. First, it invokes what is, to many, the satisfying equation of Blackness with poverty. Others will be shocked by the ignorance of the equation. Second, the title defies the commonsense meaning of the term "African-American," and enlighteningly so. For example, though Jewish South Africans make up one of the largest immigrant

groups from Africa in the United States, few Americáns have considered classifying them and their descendants as African-Americans--perhaps no one except the one South African immigrant high schooler who tested the scrutiny of the Harvard Admissions Office in the late 1980s. One can imagine the guffaw that his strategy inspired. We are little more likely to classify Moroccan-Americans or Egyptian-Americans as African-American, though they too come directly from Africa. The "Africa" in "African-American" is not simply a place but an idea that has taken form in a peculiarly American context.

Cape Verdeans make up the oldest community of African immigrants to the U.S. The population of this archipelago some 300 miles off the coast of West Africa is descended from Portuguese, other Iberian, and Genoan settlers, Jewish and Christian, as well as members of at least 27 different West African ethnic groups forcibly taken there to work the land (Halter 1993:1-3). No one appears to have settled the islands before the mid-15th century. But, by the mid-19th century, members of this relatively new Portuguese ethnic group had began to participate heavily in the whaling industry, and, by the late 19th century, they had begun to own and operate their own passenger and cargo vessels between Cape Verde and New England. Thus, until about 1924, they transported significant numbers of Cape Verdean labor into the cranberry bogs and textile mills of southeastern Massachusetts. Other Cape Verdeans had migrated to Angola,

Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau, where, as Portuguese citizens, they served as educators and bureaucrats for the Portuguese Empire. The extreme forms of violence that beset these three countries from the 1970s onward dispersed much of their Cape Verdean-ethnic elite to Portugal, France and the United States.

These free immigrants in various shades of brown had long described themselves according to a continuum of "social races" that would seem familiar to a Brazilian and almost as much so to a Cuban, Puerto Rican or Anglophone West Indian. In other words, they were quite unaccustomed to American racial binarism. On the contrary, their primordial relationship with Portugal had led Cape Verdean-Americans to expect to live alongside and participate in the same social and religious organizations as immigrants from continental Portugal and its other Atlantic island dependencies of Madeira and the Azores. But, like the lightest-skinned Louisiana Creoles after the Louisiana Purchase and light-skinned Puerto Rican migrants to the continental U.S., potentially white Lusophones quickly learned that any ethnic category that failed to distinguish them from their dark confreres would endanger their own material fortunes in the U.S. So, Cape Verdeans found themselves segregated out of "Portuguese" parishes, social clubs and neighborhoods. The strategic move by Portuguese, Madeirans and Azoreans not only helped to clarify the long-ambiguous racial status of Mediterranean-origin immigrants

but initiated a redefinition of Cape Verdean racial identity.

Of course, Cape Verdean immigrants and their children did not then automatically identify themselves with the broader native-born Black population. Their regional isolation allowed them to delay and customize their adaptation. Yet, during various historical periods when Cape Verdean men did military service away from southeastern Massachusetts, they experienced binary segregation and other forms of mistreatment by whites, as well as racially-inspired camaraderie among Blacks. They made friends and enemies among Americans without any prior knowledge of Cape Verdeans or of their delicate phenotypic distinctions and socially flexible references to race. By the 1960s, social programs meant to help Blacks, which also created employment opportunities for Black administrators, created additional incentives for Cape Verdeans to assimilate Black. Yet, according to Greenfield, the dawn of independence for the Lusophone African nations in the 1970s also inspired Cape Verdean-Americans to think of themselves as "African" (Halter 1993; Greenfield 1976).

Immigration form other parts of Africa was spearheaded by students. There had long been a trickle of continental Africans entering American universities. Most came from Anglophone West Africa and attended predominantly Black institutions. They not only knew the experience of high-handed colonialism but, living alongside Black Americans,

they suffered racial slights in segregated America. Thus, they shared common ground and, sometimes, deep emotional ties with middle-class African-Americans. Indeed, my parents were introduced to each other at Howard University by a Nigerian classmate, Dr. Badejo Adebonojo, who himself married a Black American woman and remained close to my family until his death this year. My father still recounts fond memories of him and other Nigerian classmates in college and medical school. Over the intervening years, my sister and I have made several lengthy visits to their homes in Nigeria.

Uncle Badejo took with him back to Nigeria a sense, reinforced by his African-American experience, of the importance of Black cooperation and institutional autonomy. Early African nationalist leaders of my father's friends' generation, such as Nigeria's Nnamdi Azikiwe and Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, also studied in Black American institutions. Nkrumah in particular gave international publicity to pan-Africanist ideas that had previously been articulated above all by the Black migrants converging on New York City.

The number of African students in the U.S. increased dramatically in the late 1950s and has, for the most part, continued upward since then. This increase coincided with legal desegregation and significantly altered the quality of African immigrants' relations with Black Americans. By 1991, there were 24,000 African students in U.S. colleges, representing 7% of the foreign students enrolled nationally.

According to the 1990 Census, a seventeen-percent plurality among these African students was, again, Nigerian (Okata 1993:4).[8]

Somewhat later came a significant outflow of scholars, professionals and skilled employees trained in Africa, as optimism over the prospects of political independence waned. Few of these African- or American-trained professionals and skilled workers feel able to return permanently to Africa during their professional lives. Earning in dollars is an attractive option. And, of course, political and economic instability in Africa adds to emigré Africans' uncertainty about going home. An equally important deterrent to the return of American-educated Africans is that the skills they acquire in Western universities may not fully qualify them to perform in the low-tech and therefore high-skill industries at home. They may feel frustrated at not being able to put their new high-tech skills fully to use. Businesspeople may find themselves outside the social networks--including "Old Boys'," or alumni, associations--that guarantee optimal access to profitable "contracts."

Yet, many Africans in the U.S. question whether they enjoy a higher standard of living here than they would in their home countries. Perhaps more than most immigrants to the U.S., they are obliged to accept jobs beneath their

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8 In 1976, amid the Nigerian oil boom, they had constituted 37% of the African student total (Okata 1993:4).

level of qualification, such as driving taxis, and they sorely miss the inexpensive child-care and domestic service options available at home. Even if they earn more in hard currency terms than they would at home, they often suffer more devastatingly from the absence of a community in which their earnings translate into leadership and respect. Part of what makes such leadership and respect impossible is the media's selective and prejudicial representation of Africa as squalid and savage. Behind these images, the exceptional levels of education and wealth that distinguish them from most Africans and Americans alike disappear (see Fatoye-Matory 1994).

For them, a separate but related hindrance to leadership and respect is their perceived race, which hindrance inspires the resolve of many African immigrants in the post-colonial and post-desegregation period to distance themselves from native-born African-Americans as much as possible. During the late 1960s, Africans students on white campuses apparently managed to do so, with the cooperation of white and Black Americans. In university environments, they reported highly congenial relations with whites and a disappointing rapport with native-born Blacks (e.g., Becker 1973). Especially among West African students, many reportedly engaged in public discourses about why Black Americans did not just stop whining and start taking advantage of the obvious opportunities available to them; others wondered aloud why alienated Black Americans did not

just "come home" to Africa. Some writings suggest that East Africans, with their more direct experience of settler colonialism and racism, were more sensitive to African-American aspirations and sympathetic to African-American protests during the period (Olorunsola 1969). Indeed, African-American nationalists' embrace of Kiswahili as their national language (although very few of their ancestors had come from Kiswahili-speaking East Africa) may have enhanced this rapport. Tension between West Africans and African-Americans notwithstanding, the many African men who marry in the U.S. seem disproportionately to marry other blacks--that is, both the native- and the Caribbean-born.[9] It is not clear, however, that they automatically identify with what, in the United States, is called "African" religion or with the other imagery of pan-African identity propagated by African-Americans.

On the one hand, bourgeois Nigerians in Nigeria who know about the practice of "Yoruba" religion in Brazil, Cuba and the United States take some pride in what it proves

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9 Marriages between African-American men and African-born women are far more rare, at least partly because of the predominance of men in the black African immigrant pool and because African-American men, far more often than African-American women, prefer light-skinned mates. Cornell West and I are the only African-American men I know personally who are married to African-born women.

about the intrinsic strength of "their" culture. Indeed, the King of Ife, which bourgeois Nigerians regard as the preeminent Yoruba city, has extended the authority and prestige of his dynasty by crowning Oseijeman Adefunmi I, an African-American orisa priest, as the King of the Yoruba in North America.10 On the other hand, Nigerian Yoruba friends in the U.S. whom I have invited to attend Afro-Cuban Ocha ceremonies tend to express more fear than interest, much less any willingness to join in. There are, however, a few Nigerians, like the orisa priest Epega in Indiana and the drumming instructor Olatunji in New York, who have become famous for their participation in the Yoruba cultural renaissance among North Americans.[11] Professor Rowland Abiodun, art historian at Amherst College, is one of many African members of Black Studies Departments in American universities. He has added his voice to the integration of Yoruba art into the African-American cultural canon. In conjunction with art historian Robert Farris Thompson, Zairean cultural entrepreneur Fu-Kiau Bunseki-Lumanisa has led a recent generation of influential scholars and priests

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10 The king of Ife's rival city, Oyo, has proceeded similarly, in conferring chieftaincy titles upon orixá priests in Brazil.

11 A comparable Yoruba renaissance is taking place in Cuba, its post-1959 diaspora, Brazil and the countries to which labor migrations have linked it, especially Argentina.

to establish the centrality of the Kongo cultural legacy in Black American culture. This project, well-precedented in the work of Black American scholar Lorenzo Turner, continues in the work of the Zairean-born Professor Salikoko Mufwene at the University of Chicago (see Turner 1949).

Several African-origin ethnic groups in the U.S., not including the Yoruba or the BaKongo, are prolific in their formation of distinct organizations that mobilize African culture in the invocation of ethnic, rather than pan-African or racial, unity. Without having undertaken any exhaustive investigative efforts, I know of half a dozen ethnic and family organizations, and numerous gatherings, among African immigrants to the United States that invoke the signs of "traditional" culture, not only for their enjoyment but to legitimize their solidarity. For example, the Asanteman Association of the New England States crowns one of several democratically elected, regional kings of the Ghanaian Asante in North America. Among Nigerian-origin Igbo immigrants in the U.S., the Philadelphia-based Ngwa Family Association-Delaware Valley was launched in 1993 with a "Cultural Festival." Igbo weddings in the Boston area often feature sacred masquerades. And at most intra-ethnic ceremonial events among African immigrants, adults wear the "traditional" formal attire of their home country. In various U.S. cities, there are also churches of the Aladura type, which represents a distinctive style of Yoruba "spiritual" Christianity. Yet, the Baptist, Pentecostal,

Methodist and Anglican majority of Yoruba immigrants in the U.S. is disinclined to focus its negotiation of identity upon such institutions.

While African immigrants are deeply offended by American representations of Africa as squalid and savage, African-Americans' Egypt-centered or romanticized representations of Africa, as well as our borrowing of African "traditional" paraphernalia, tend to annoy some Africans. While my Nigerian immigrant friends have difficulty explaining this annoyance to me, one might guess that it stems at least partly from the implication, dangerous in the context of white American dominance, that ethnic Africans immigrants are not so different from native-born African Americans.

Yet, it may be even more instructive to consider how the skills, educational level, and income level of African immigrants shape their willingness to assimilate Black. Yancey, Ericksen and Juliani (1976) point out that the creation and retention of ethnic identity among past generations of European immigrants was heavily conditioned by certain economic conditions. At certain points in U.S. history, poor transporation and the concentration of low-skill jobs in the center-cities encouraged co-residence and cooperation within culturally similar groups entering a given region at the same time. By contrast, people with greater skills, more employment flexibility, and more money were less likely to remain in such cooperative ethnic

clusters and therefore less likely to create or retain ethnic identities.

Likewise, among African-Americans, the poor and working-class ghettoes are focal points in the production and reproduction of distinctively Black culture--hence the preeminence of ghetto diction, dress, music and political concerns in the marking of Black difference among all classes of Blacks. Moreover, despite the general strength of middle-class Blacks' identification with lower-class Blacks, Hughes and Hertel (1990) show that "black consciousness" is inversely correlated with "socioeconomic status." In other words, with increasing income and educational levels, Blacks show a decreasing pride in their Blackness, a decreasing willingness to prioritize their Black identity, and a decreasing preference for Black separatism. Thus, highly educated and eventually high-earning African immigrants' resistance to Black racial identity amplifies a general African-American dynamic, as well as a dynamic noted by Yancey et al in a previous generation of white immigrants. Perhaps they even show us why one of the most privileged and internationally mobile professional classes on the planet--professors at elite universities--has shown itself so antagonistic to the collective identities that less privileged classes regularly feel they depend on for their survival.

On the other hand, because African immigrants tend disproportionately to live <u>within</u> Black communities, they

also manifest the phenomenon observed by Waters among the "upwardly-mobile" children of West Indian immigrants--that is, they represent their sub-racial, ethnic identities as what distinguishes them from the children of native-born Blacks, whom they stereotype (at least in conversations with investigators from the university) as socio-economic underachievers (see Waters 1994). Indeed, because of continuing, extra-legal residental segregation and their own initially limited earning potentials, black African immigrants' first prolonged exposure to African-Americans is far more likely to be among the most excluded classes of African-Americans than among the two-thirds to three-quarters of African-Americans who are now middle-class (Gaines 1995:1, 6).

Thus, the unique trajectory of continental Africans' entry into American society, conditioned as it is by race and socioeconomic status, explains much about their resistance to assimilating Black. On the other hand, in a society that excludes even skilled blacks from so many areas of endeavor, more than a few African entrepreneurs have mobilized their comparative advantage in supplying the African tokens of Black identity in the U.S. Some African manufacturers and merchants have profited healthily from marketing African dashikis, boubous, snakeskin pocketbooks, kente cloth, jewelry and carvings, precisely because, since the 1960s, West Indians, Latinos, and native-born African-

Americans have cooperatively established the value of investing in these tokens of Black assimilation.

Race: a Home or a Prison

In illustrating the process of assimilation to Blackness in U.S. society, I do not mean to imply that it accounts for the full complexity of migrant identity formation in Black America, or that it is the only alternative to "becoming white," as Ignatiev (1995) describes European immigrant assimilation strategies. For example, beyond the "Black" and "white" assimilation tracks, there may be a "Latino" one as well, characterized by its own patterns of endogamy, cultural diacritica, and standards of achievement. It might also be important to explore the divergence between Black lower-class and Black middle-class tracks. The pattern of older Asian groups' intermarriage with whites demonstrates, to my mind, that American assimilation tracks do not multiply infinitely, but the tendency toward endogamy among newer Asian immigrant groups, like Koreans (Mary Waters, personal communication--22 March 1996), might prove more durable and constitute a further assimilation track.

But my main point, and the one by which the effectiveness of this argument should be judged, is less specific and exhaustive. I have argued that race in the United States is a project substantially informed by migrant and immigrant assimilation, and by the socio-economic

circumstances and creativity of its agents as well. One might highlight four of its constituent implications: first, that there is more than one recognizable immigrant assimilation track in the U.S.; second, that the Black track is a highly important one (particularly in the lives of dark immigrants and white youth), with its own complex history; third, that these tracks are shaped by a logic of mutual exclusion and therefore of continuous mutual transformation; and, fourth, that selectively recognized features of descent and phenotype are regularly among the criteria of membership.

Mind you, their selectiveness does not falsify these features or the idiom of social unity and mobilization formed by their recognition. The inconsistency of this idiom with biological "science" is less significant than the way that circumstances have informed its use by the people for whom it matters deeply. With immigration, people lose much of their distinctive language and culture and yet need some way of identifying the boundaries of cooperative groups. In the North American case, physical appearance has become an ideal emblem of membership--it naturalizes the endurance of loyalties beyond historical homogenization and diversification of values, residential location, and particular projects. African-Americans engage in an elaborate discourse of natural unity, beyond that of physical appearance. It enlists as proof our alleged ability to dance, our allegedly superior sexual endowment,

and the allegedly distinctive quality not only of our diction but of our voices, all of which claims tend to be convincing to white Americans, who share in their authorship However, they are marginal to or absent from other nations' definitions of "blackness," as in Brazil, where the idea of a racially distinctive singing or speaking voice is virtually unheard of.

These descent- and phenotype-related criteria are so specific to the history of North American immigration, politics and literature that they withstand no scrutiny from academic biology. Their arbitrariness is highlighted when set alongside Latin American, West Indian, Cape Verdean and Louisiana Creole versions of "race." To take another example for the Anglophone world, in England during the 1980s, a very different combination of descent groups and phenotypes was classified as "Black." In various state-sponsored programs and public political mobilizations, the category included Pakistanis, Indians, Chinese, West Indians and Africans. The North American narrative of immigration and race is no universal blueprint. Nor is any such narrative invulnerable to dramatic changes of course. In the 1990s, for example, the "Black" category in England has come to refer to, or invoke, only the shared status of Africans, West Indians and their descendants.

Indeed, the past two decades have seen the resurrection and celebration of ethnic identities among not only whites

but blacks as well. And, in an age of improved transportation and communication, Caribbean immigrants supply an old and vigorous model in the formation of transnational communities, structured by the constant flux and reflux of people and money between Third-World nations and their immigrant citizens. There are other groups, particularly West African immigrants, who feel intensely irritated by the fantastic imagery of pan-Africanist discourse in North America. However, none of these trends seems seriously to have compromised the centripetal force of "race" in American culture and political economy. The formation of ethnic and racial identity in Black America is neither unidirectional nor monolithic. Least of all is it determined by a primordial and shared identity or culture. On the other hand, it is not chosen independently of cultural, biological, social and legal constraints.

Nor do I mean to imply that this "racial" assimilation deserves to be celebrated without qualification. On the one hand, this process has flowed from a novel ethic of mutual political responsibility and has achieved for African-Americans a greater degree of power over their collective material fate than that enjoyed by any other group of similarly outnumbered people of African descent in the world. On the other hand, it has been accompanied by its own forms of coercion, silencing, and disempowerment. First, it reproduces a history of segregation and racism, leading us to nurse forever a sense of collective grievance

and affliction. In a way, such a sense of our nationality restricts the breadth of our collective creativity. Second, the preservation of "the race" has often involved rejecting those who wanted to join and pressuring those who didn't. Respect for the diversity of our cultural values, economic interests, and personal tastes has been a major casualty of the strategic racial solidarity. Like assimilation to whiteness, assimilation to Blackness works most effectively through native-born children's bullying of foreign-born children, who at first look and act different. The children of not only Black immigrants but middle-class professionals and various "little races" (Thompson 1972) often learn to be ashamed of their backgrounds and of their academic acheivement, or at least to conceal them in an array of public settings, lest they be rejected for "acting white." At least since the 1960s, those among us with Native American ancestry have been taught through mockery to shut up about it. Those avowing such ancestry might be told, "Oh, you must be a member of the Monig Tribe--Mo' Niggah than anything!"[12] The mockery arises from the defensive

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12 A more subtly humorous but better financed reproach to the claims of phenotypically black Indians and Indian tribes came from Donald Trump, who complained during Congressional hearings about unfair competition from the casinos whose ownership by Indian tribes exempts them from certain types of state- and federal-government regulation. Of the

view that even the most truthful claims of diverse ancestry are an insult to other Blacks and a threat to our very survival.

Yet, competitive displays of Blackness are themselves sometimes as threat to survival. They constitute a hierarchy of achievement with considerable costs in time, energy and human life, since some diacritica of Blackness are explicit forms of rebellion against the "dominant" order. As teenagers, most of us have endeavored to dress,

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numerous northeastern Indian tribes thus entering the casino industry, Trump quipped, "[they] don't look like Indians to me" (Johnson 1993:6). His understated appeal to American racial commonsense probably provoked from his audience the satisfied laughter of white in-group humor and assent. Trump's conspiratorial humor was so effective that it formed the lead in a New York Times article describing the case as a crisis and detailing the resulting efforts of congressmen, lobbyists and the Connecticut General Assembly to get the whole tribal recognition process revamped. Wealthy whites and their representatives were not the only ones with an interest. Representatives of the "'conservative' Western tribes" (whose faces are much more likely to show the outcome of intermarriage with whites than with blacks) rushed forth to demand clarifications in the process that would not endanger the legitimacy of their racial and legal claims. See also Clifford (1988:277-346).

dance and talk our way into urban, working-class African-Americanness. We have changed their hair, altered our gait, and tailored our politics to meet an unattainably Black ideal. The misguided have been willing to prove their loyalty through death-defying machismo and quixotic confrontations with the police.

Despite the coercive or reactionary nature of Black assimilation in certain contexts, many bi-racials and African-Americans who have grown up in all-white communities find their periodic identification with the race empowering. One recent Harvard graduate and friend of mine not only chose to major in Afro-American studies but participated in the bi-racial students' organization, Prism, when it was active (It has disappeared and reappeared several times during the '90s). Few of the applications, questionnaires, and other occasions of official or public communication that determine so many of a young scholars opportunities sanction such an identity choice. My friend finds the "other" category on official documents disempowering. There is no sense of solidarity, common interest, shared mission, or mutual affirmation in such a class of "others." Having chosen "Black" made him something. Moreover, even if choosing "white" would not quite have been a lie, it would still have been perceived as such. Though not fully satisfied with the category "Black," my friend felt that the "Black" rubric at least gave him "more capital with which to negotiate [his] identity." Without being sanguine, he

celebrates having a choice even where the choices are themselves confining.

My friend's testimony alerts us to the reality of postmodern contentions about identity, that neither ethnicity nor race functions as a singular container of persons and groups but two among various identities and social roles through which we bid for the fulfillment of our needs and desires. Yet, it is well to remember that not everyone has the same breadth of choices, that aggregate social realities make some identities more materially compelling and consequential than others, and that our personal desires and needs are themselves heavily determined by the cultural choices we are given.

Not all multi-racials are equally willing to see the silver lining. One Japanese-African-Native American woman told journalist Itabari Njeri, "African-Americans want us to be their political slaves....They are saying 'Come join us.' But it's not because of some great brother or sister love--it's political. If their numbers decrease, their chance of getting public funds decrease[s]--as well as political representation. To me, that's a totally unethical way of saying that you want people to be a member of your community. As far as I am concerned all slavery is over--whether it's physical slavery on the plantation or political slavery that gives one group, like African Americans, the audacity to say that they own people because they have one drop of African blood" (Njeri 1993: 24). What Njeri's

informant thinks would happen to her political representation if African-Americans abandoned the one-drop rule is another question. A worst-case scenario might be Brazil, where half of the population has at least "one drop," no more than 6% of the general population will admit being "black" (or preto) to census-takers, and almost no one in either subset would vote for a politician of visibly African descent.

A further question that comes to my mind is whether the bi-racials, light-skinned descendents of mulattoes, Creoles, Trinidadians and Jamaicans are not benefiting disproportionately from the collective of the race. By virtue of motivation, education, class status, or white favoritism, some of those groups have been in a position to benefit disproportionately from reforms won largely by the efforts of the dark-skinned and the native-born during the Civil Rights movement. For example, affirmative action and a generation legislation against "racial" discrimination appear to have done little to upset complexion-coded and perhaps ethnically coded class hierarchies within the African-American community or their consequences upon the average African-American's access to income and education (Hughes and Hertel 1990). So-called "light-skinned Blacks" have long enjoyed higher average levels of income, education, employment and professional status than the dark-skinned. These discrepancies have hardly narrowed over time. Like bi-racials and light-skinned Blacks, the

offspring of West Indian immigrants are remarkably well-represented in Harvard's undergraduate population, for example.

I am saying no more, and perhaps a good deal less, than is University of Chicago sociologist William Julius Wilson, as he observes that middle-class African-Americans have drawn disproportionate benefits from affirmative action programs. Unlike Wilson, I do not doubt that middle-class African-Americans are in need of compensation for past racial discrimination and concerted legal protection from ongoing discrimination. Nor do I doubt it about light-skinned Blacks, West Indian ethnics, and bi-racials. Hence, to observe that any particular African-American group has benefited disproportionately is not to call those benefits inappropriate.

So, my observation is not a plea for ethnic fission or an effort to undermine the accomplishment of any African-American who, against systematically negative odds, has made it. Rather, it is a proposal for the honest recognition of the diverse forms of disadvantage and pain that afflict us. More importantly, it is a celebration of a pivotal but neglected dimension of American cultural history. No, we live in a hemisphere where Black political unity and representation are rarities and the attachment of "pride" to the adjective "Black" is generally oxymoronic. We live in a country where people of African descent are represented, by both common people and scholars who should know better, as a

seething and homogeneous mass of misery. We live in the age of "ethnic cleansing." The cultural dynamism and cosmopolitan politics of a multi-ethnic African-American society deserve recognition as an example to others.

Conclusion

Both the academy and the public communications media have left an analytic void between two copiously discussed dimensions of African-American life--the deprivation and dysfunctionality of the ghetto, on the one hand, and the extraordinary power of Black artistic and political movements, on the other. Between these lies a space of intelligible everyday politics within and at the borders of socially complex Black communities. It must be made clear to all concerned that "race" is no more a tenable biological concept than is "nation," "ethnic group," or "tribe." It must be made equally clear that horrors have been committed by the bearers of these concepts. But any claim that race does not exist is, frankly, other-worldly, and the claim that it should not exist is no more beneficent or value-neutral than is the claim that nations, ethnic groups and tribes should not. The claim that it is epiphenomenal to various forms of oppression may be partly true, but race is also an important variable in its own right, not easily reducible, at least in the American context, to class, ethnicity, or nationhood, for example. Moreover, migration seems to be as central a feature as and a more enduring

feature of racial forms of assimilation and organization than is oppression per se. Finally, I would appeal to the critics of racial discourse to reconsider the contemporary, emic content of local "race" concepts, as among African-Americans, and, until we find a more apt replacement, to refine rather than jettisoning "race" as an analytic concept.

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